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14. ABSTRACT

The prosperity of a nation is directly linked to the education of its population. An educated population has the knowledge base and skill necessary to translate its country's natural wealth (people, land, resources) into material wealth (economic strength and competitiveness). In Nigeria, this link is missing, undermined by rampant corruption at all levels of its educational system. The most damaging aspect of corruption is the amount of money lost through practices such as embezzlement. To prevent such losses, this paper recommends that the Government of Nigeria undertake a comprehensive anti-corruption campaign centered around establishing accountability throughout its educational sector. The analysis suggests that accountability is best achieved through *indirect* methods aimed at increasing capacity in three distinct, yet overlapping areas: data collection, management, and oversight. Those who oppose this approach argue the most effective means of battling corruption is through direct measures that use punitive acts as deterrents against further corruption. The paper concludes with specific recommendations that could help the Nigerian Government reduce the impacts of corruption in its school system and achieve its objective of universal, free, and compulsory education for its youth.

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Capstone Research Paper

The Nigerian Paradox

by

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Seminar 3

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

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02 November 2012

Table of Contents

Abstract

The prosperity of a nation is directly linked to the education of its population. An educated population has the knowledge base and skill necessary to translate its country's natural wealth (people, land, resources) into material wealth (economic strength and competitiveness). In Nigeria, this link is missing, undermined by rampant corruption at all levels of its educational system. The most damaging aspect of corruption is the amount of money lost through practices such as embezzlement. To prevent such losses, this paper recommends that the Government of Nigeria undertake a comprehensive anti-corruption campaign centered around establishing accountability throughout its educational sector. The analysis suggests that accountability is best achieved through *indirect* methods aimed at increasing capacity in three distinct, yet overlapping areas: data collection, management, and oversight. Those who oppose this approach argue the most effective means of battling corruption is through direct measures that use punitive acts as deterrents against further corruption. The paper concludes with specific recommendations that could help the Nigerian Government reduce the impacts of corruption in its school system and achieve its objective of universal, free, and compulsory education for its youth.

I. Introduction

The date was September 8, 2009, a Tuesday not unlike any other. The President of the United States could have been anywhere from Washington to Tokyo and all points in between. Yet, on this day, President Obama's destination was Wakefield High School in Arlington, Virginia. In a historic, nationally televised address to America's youth, the President's message was simple: The future prosperity of the country is directly related to the education of its youth. In unequivocal terms, he told America's youth, "If you quit on school—you're not just quitting on yourself, you're quitting on your country".[1]

Understanding this fundamental truth, the United Nations introduced its "Education For All" (EFA) movement in 1990.[2] Ten years later at the World Education Forum, Nigeria was one of 164 nations that pledged to achieve EFA goals by 2015 and introduced its Universal Basic Education (UBE) program as a strategy to meet these commitments.[3] Unfortunately, Nigeria's efforts to improve its educational system have proven largely ineffective, plagued by rampant corruption at each level of government.

While corrupt practices in Nigeria's educational sector manifest themselves in many ways, the most damaging aspect of corruption is the amount of money lost through practices such as embezzlement. In fact, research shows, as much as 80 percent of funds allocated for education do not make it to the intended programs.[4] To prevent such losses, the Government of Nigeria (GoN) should undertake a comprehensive anti-corruption campaign centered around establishing accountability throughout its educational sector. This strategy

achieves accountability through *indirect* methods aimed at increasing capacity in three distinct, yet overlapping areas: data collection, management, and oversight.

The potential benefits of such an approach are immense. In the short-term, it would allow the GoN to achieve its policy objective of universal, free, and compulsory education for its youth.[5] In the long-term, it would encourage foreign investment, reduce the influence of extremist groups such as Boko Haram, and enhance Nigeria's prospects for economic growth and competitiveness. The greatest benefit, however, is that such a program would invest in Nigeria's most precious resource: the minds of its 168 million people.

II. Background
The Importance of Education

Addressing the role of education in society, the Swiss developmental psychologist Jean Piaget once said, "The principle goal of education is to create men who are capable of doing new things, not simply of repeating what other generations have done – men who are creative, inventive and discoverers."[6] In other words, education is more than simply the procurement of knowledge for the benefit of the individual. It's an investment in the future of society, a means to allow for the continual growth and evolution of the *collective*.

An educated society is one that can think for itself. Education generates *ideas*. In this, its real power lies. Without education, new and creative ideas are in short supply, and the ceiling for societal growth is extremely limited. Worse, an uneducated population is extremely vulnerable to manipulation. Unable to

generate ideas for themselves, they unwittingly grasp onto ideas that are propagated by others. Ideas that are destructive to society, advanced by groups like Nigeria's Islamic militant organization Boko Haram, whose goal is the acquisition of power and control.[7] In summary, education forms the critical link between a country's natural wealth (people, land, resources) and its material wealth (economic strength and global competitiveness). In parts of the world where this link is missing, extensive poverty, high unemployment, and instability often result.

III. Main Body

The Objective

The objective provides purpose to planning and answers the question "to what end?"[8] About the importance of the objective, the great Prussian military theorist Carl von Clausewitz famously said, "Pursue one great decisive aim with force and determination—a maxim which should take first place among all causes of victory."[9] Clausewitz's truism, while applicable at all levels of war, is especially true during the military planning process. Planners must always remain cognizant of the objective, lest the entire effort becomes pointless.[10] Additionally, the evaluation of the objective should be an iterative process, always ensuring the stated ends are achievable given current means and constraints.[11] Looking at Nigeria's educational system, the policy objective is clear: "Ensure that by 2015 all children have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality."[12] The following paragraphs seek to discover the root

causes that prevent Nigeria from achieving this objective, and suggest an approach that allows for a reversal of this trend.

The Problem – The Nigerian Paradox

Nigeria is not fulfilling the commitments it made to Education For All in 2000.[13] As Otive Igbuzor confirms, "If current trends continue, the target of achieving universal primary education by 2015 will be missed by at least a decade."[14] Today, an estimated ten million (of thirty million) Nigerian school-aged children are not in school;[15] the country's literacy rate is estimated at 61 percent;[16] and 50 percent of the nation's primary school teachers are unqualified.[17] Accordingly, this failure to properly educate the nation's youth has had devastating impacts on Nigeria's economic growth and prosperity. Unemployment is at 21 percent and rising;[18] the percentage of the population living below the poverty line is at 70 percent;[19] and Nigeria's misery index, which combines unemployment and inflation, is at 36 percent.[20] All of these metrics place Nigeria near the bottom of the world rankings. Given the country's immense human and natural resources, it's an equation that does not add up. Fittingly, the situation has been termed "The Nigerian Paradox".[21]

For answers to this paradox, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) offers some insight. It contends, "The fact that too many developing countries are in dire economic straits today—even those with ample natural resources—is strongly linked to the susceptibility to *corruption* of the ruling class."[22] Such is the case in Nigeria, where corruption is so intertwined with

society that it is viewed as a normal aspect of everyday life.[23] Indeed, in its 2011 world rankings, Transparency International ranked Nigeria among the most corrupt nations in the world, giving it a "highly corrupt" 2.4 score.[24] Understanding the symbiotic nature of corruption to Nigerian society is critical when formulating an anti-corruption strategy and will be discussed in-depth later in this analysis.

The effects of corruption, while damaging enough to society writ large, have had a crippling effect on the nation's educational system, which is already beset by an acute shortage of qualified teachers, adequate infrastructure, and available instructional material. Corruption exacerbates these problems by robbing the system of the funding designed to fix these shortcomings in the first place. As Emmanuel Ejere states, "It is obvious that not all funds allocated for the UBE program are used for the intended purposes, due to high level of corruption in key implementing agencies and wasteful spending."[25] The resultant lack of funding manifests itself in the form of dilapidated schools. For example, studies show that 12 percent of students sit on the floor, 38 percent of classrooms have no ceilings, 87 percent of classrooms are overcrowded, and 77 percent of students lack textbooks.[26] Given these conditions, it is clearly not possible to achieve *universal* basic education, let alone make it *compulsory*. So despite laudable political commitments to education for all and a sound program (UBE) to meet these commitments, the entire effort is undermined and made worse by corruption. Thus, a nation with immense natural resources routinely ranks among the poorest nations in the world.

The Environment – The Problem in Context

Having defined the problem, it's important to put it into proper context before moving forward with a solution. Looking at the current environmental conditions in Nigeria, two major issues come to the forefront. First, because of its historical roots, Nigerians view corruption as an integral part of everyday life. Second, corruption continues to thrive because the system allows it. Together, these factors both inform and constrain possible solution-sets.

Corruption has been a part of Nigerian society since the colonial days of the early 20th Century. However, the early days of independence in the 1960s saw the full transformation of corruption into its definitive (and current) form. With the anti-colonial ideology that once unified the country long gone, politicians unabashedly used corruption as a means for maintaining power. Martin Meredith, in his epic novel *The Fate of Africa*, captures the essence of this transformation: "In Nigeria, the first years of independence became an orgy of power being turned into profit. Power itself in effect came to rest on the ability to bribe."[27]

It was a situation for which Nigeria had no defense. Lacking the institutional capacity and educated population base to thwart these changes, Nigeria was laid bare, at the mercy of those motivated only by greed and lust for power. As this condition was allowed to fester and grow, corruption became woven into the very fabric of society. Nigerians came to view it as normal way of life, accepted as a means of getting by, earning a living, obtaining a service or avoiding hassle.[28] Consequently, Nigerians today simply don't view themselves as corrupt and meet

attempts to highlight corruption as a problem of their society with extreme sensitivity.[29] It is exactly this mentality that makes devising solutions so difficult.

Additionally, corruption thrives because the system makes it both easy and profitable.[30] This should come as little surprise considering those responsible for building the system are the same people who benefit most from corrupt practices. Therefore, when seeking strategies that will fundamentally alter the system, planners must bear in mind they are working not only against history, but also working against a system that is designed to allow corruption from the very highest levels.

Taken as a whole, the above analysis offers useful insights into the viability of possible solutions. Specifically, overreliance on direct attacks on corruption, while having an understandable appeal, are likely to be ineffective given the inherent sensitivities of the population and the deeply imbedded nature of the problem. Therefore, strategies must be devised that can attack corruption through *indirect* methods. As Shah and Schacter state, "the key lies in finding alternative 'entry points' that will lead inevitably to the underlying governance-based drivers of corruption."[31] Increasing accountability is one such entry point. Therefore, this analysis offers the following course of action: the Government of Nigeria should undertake a comprehensive anti-corruption campaign centered around establishing accountability throughout its educational sector. Free of the burden of corruption, Nigeria can reconstitute its school system and achieve its objective of universal, free, and compulsory education for all its youth.

The Solution – Incentivizing Accountability

Merriam-Webster defines accountability as "an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions."[32] In the educational sector, accountability extends from the political leadership all the way down to the classroom level. The idea of accountability is important because those who hold themselves accountable are more likely to conduct business in an open, honest manner consistent with accepted societal norms. In Nigeria, leaders are not accountable because the system lacks the capacity to hold them accountable. Laws and controls meant to limit corrupt practices may be in place, but these measures are meaningless if the system lacks the means to enforce them. With limited risk of being discovered, there is little incentive for leaders to be accountable. Therefore, the recommended approach aims to *incentivize accountability* by increasing capacity in three distinct, yet overlapping areas: data collection, management, and oversight.

Improving Data Collection

Corruption thrives as a result of a *lack of data*. Without data, an "information asymmetry" is created between officials and the general public.[33] The entire system becomes shrouded in ambiguity and the general public must *assume* that public funds are being used wisely and for intended purposes. As evidenced by the multi-million-dollar corruption scandal that rocked Long Island's Roslyn School District in 2004, this situation is extremely vulnerable to corruption.[34] Leaders realize the information required to hold them accountable is absent, and

thus have no qualms about partaking in corrupt practices. Therefore, the goal of

increasing the data collection capacity of the system is to empower key

stakeholders with knowledge to make informed decisions. As stated in the 2010

Nigeria Education Data Survey (NEDS), "Over the years, a major challenge

faced by policy makers in Nigeria is obtaining reliable information to enhance the

decision-making process."[35] The presence of data does this by increasing the

transparency in the system and allowing informed planning to occur.

 Whereas a lack of data shrouds a system in ambiguity, the presence of

accurate, reliable data allows it to operate transparently vis-à-vis the operators

and the general public. Jacques Hallak and Muriel Poisson, in their book *Corrupt*

schools, corrupt universities: What can be done?, define transparency in

education as "the extent to which stakeholders can understand the basis on

which educational resources are allocated to their individual establishment and

how they are used."[36] In other words, a transparent process is one that is visible,

predictable, and understandable to an outside audience.[37] The relationship

between transparency and accountability is direct and inseparable, and

incentivizes accountability in two ways.[38] First, as a deterrent, transparency

makes people less likely to act unethically because they know their actions are

observable. Second, as an enabler, transparency enforces accountability by

making people more aware of how processes are completed. Free from the

information asymmetry that leads to assumptions and inaction, people are

empowered to take ownership of their programs.[39] In a democratic state like

Nigeria, effective ownership manifests itself as political pressure on the country's

leadership to make the necessary changes to the program. Hallak and Poisson capture the essence of this strategy as such: "Transparency enables institutions—and the public—to make informed political decisions, it improves the accountability of governments, and reduces the scope for corruption."[40]

The second benefit of increasing the data collection capacity of Nigeria's educational system is it allows informed planning to take place. As Ejere states, "Without accurate and reliable data, no meaningful planning can be done and it will be difficult to avoid policy breakdown at the implementation stage."[41] Specifically, in the context of balancing ends, ways, and means, the presence of data allows for the measurement of the means available to the planner. This measurement is critical to the establishment of reference points and milestones in the planning process. Reference points provide planners with a known starting point from which they can measure deviations as new data becomes available. For example, if a strategy calls for 100 desks to go to school A, but the planner has no idea how many desks currently reside in the system, it's impossible to move forward with any kind of fidelity in planning and execution.

Milestones, which form key decision points along the path towards the desired endstate, are the basis from which to measure planning and policy implementation progress. Data is instrumental in this process in that it provides the means to measure whether or not certain milestones have been achieved. Accountability is a natural extension of this ability because officials realize that the system now has the capacity to hold them accountable. Using the example from above, if the plan calls for 100 desks to be provided to school A, but school

A only receives 75 desks, there exists a clear basis for questioning or investigation. Empowered both with knowledge (through transparency) and a means to hold officials accountable, key stakeholders can make informed decisions as how to best influence future policy implementation.

Strengthening Management Capacity

Managers implement policy. They provide the critical connection between policy directives and policy results. Managers of an educational system require a diverse skill-set, ranging anywhere from planning to accounting. In planning, managers must be able to capture the data, compare the data to existing plans, and based on that comparison, make decisions on the future direction of the program. The development of effective long-term plans avoids the pitfalls of the compulsory use of funds (short-term projects designed to use up the budget) that only facilitates corrupt practices.[42] In accounting, managers are entrusted to ensure allocated resources are spent in ways consistent with policy objectives.[43] Failures of management offer innumerable avenues for corruption to occur. As Hallak and Poisson state, "Improving skills in management, accounting, monitoring, and audit are basic requirements for reducing corruption in education."[44] Therefore, for countries that lack sufficient capacity for effective management, this area quickly becomes a focal point for any anti-corruption strategy.

In Nigeria, the educational system suffers from a critical shortage of qualified managers. The situation is especially acute in the areas of accounting and

11

finance, where the government sorely needs the addition of qualified accountants, auditors, and statisticians. In lack of this skill-set, the most of the important aspects of the budgeting and accounting duties are left to clerks who know very little about such tasks.[45] Consequently, Nigeria's educational system suffers from weak planning and budgeting, poor financial management, and questionable procurement practices.[46]

To incentivize accountability into Nigeria's management system, it is apparent that providing managers with relevant and sufficient data from which to make informed decisions is an important first step. As discussed previously, the absence of data only aggravates the situation by enabling corruption. Additionally, given that the capacity of Nigeria's managers is limited by ignorance as much as malice, future strategies should focus on training as an integral piece of the overall plan. As Hallak and Poisson confirm, "improving transparency in education entails a massive need for training at all levels in the educational system, in particular in the production, analysis, dissemination and understanding of information."[47] Providing quality training is clearly an area in which international organizations can effect positive change and should be an essential element in future accountability strategies.

Ensuring Oversight Integrity

The importance of effective oversight to help incentivize accountability cannot be overstated. According to the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, "Corruption is made possible through a lack of or insufficient

supervision."[48] Oversight not only ensures that money is spent for approved purposes, but also that institutions adhere to prescribed financial and administrative regulations.[49] An effective oversight program essentially places a seal of approval on the entire educational system. This sort of "blessing" is important when quality education depends to a large degree on foreign assistance, training, and funding.

In Nigeria, a lack of integrity in the oversight process only worsens the corruption already present in the system. Anastasia Onuorah opines, "The high level of corruption in the public sector of Nigeria is basically as a result of the failure of auditing."[50] Ideally, the oversight process could be handled entirely through mechanisms internal to Nigeria's educational system. However, given the susceptibility of such mechanisms to corruption, the internal auditing process is an unreliable means for enforcing accountability. Therefore, it is essential that internal oversight efforts be combined with independent, external evaluations.[51] These two groups would work with overlapping mandates and serve as compliments to one another.[52] As with management, the international community plays a vital role in oversight by providing the professional, neutral, and independent oversight bodies that are so crucial to maintaining controls and accountability.

It is critical to note that data collection, management, and oversight are dependent on one another for the successful implementation of any one part of the larger strategy. For example, a vigorous data collection system and competent management are essential preconditions for effective oversight.

Therefore, success of strategy as a whole is predicated on implementing the three tenets of the strategy in parallel.

IV. Counterargument

An Alternate Approach

It might be argued that, while an indirect approach towards battling corruption has merit, the best way to eliminate corruption is through the direct targeting of corruption itself. A direct approach uses legal and institutional methods to improve the detection, enforcement, and prosecution of corrupt acts that have *already* occurred.[53] The enforcement mechanism of such an approach typically takes the form of watchdog agencies like the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) or some other auditing-type agency designed to root out corrupt practices.[54] Perpetrators of corrupt acts are subject to punitive action that advocates argue have a significant deterrent effect on future corruption. Additionally, the highly visible nature of these punitive cases rouses civil society, providing the necessary political capital for further anti-corruption measures. Finally, advocates reason that a direct approach achieves results that are quicker and more concrete than those of indirect approaches, which can take years to bear fruit.[55]

While this approach might appeal to the average citizen, and often resonates with international audiences, its window of effectiveness is extremely narrow and its success is completely dependent on the country-specific drivers that fuel corruption.[56] In the case of Nigeria, such an approach would fail for the following

three reasons. First, as previously mentioned, because corruption is woven into

the very fabric of Nigerian society, Nigerians view corruption not as an evil, but

as an essential element to everyday life. Thus, overt anti-corruption actions

would only serve to polarize much of the population against the implementation

of the larger strategy.[57] Second, studies show that direct methods of battling

corruption are only effective in countries where governance is high and

corruption is low, which is not the case in Nigeria.[58] Finally, in countries like

Nigeria, where corruption is widespread, direct methods only get at a symptom of

the greater problem. In summary, a direct attack on corruption provides a

politically beneficial "quick fix" to the problem and may even achieve early

successes. However, over the long-term, its results will likely prove

counterproductive and fail to endure.[59]

V. Conclusion

Relevance to U.S. Policy

Nelson Mandela is famously quoted as saying, "Education is the most

powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."[60] For Nigeria,

corruption of its educational system dulls the blade of this weapon. With

corruption undermining efforts to improve education, Nigerians are unable to

adequately translate their immense natural resources into national wealth and

prosperity. While this problem may seem irrelevant to the United States,

Nigeria's failure to achieve universal education for its youth leaves 10 million

school-aged children on the street. Lacking education and direction, these

children are vulnerable to extremist rhetoric and propaganda from groups such as Boko Haram. This has a natural destabilizing effect on the country that manifests itself in the form of violence, human rights violations, and in the worst cases, terrorism. Therefore, given the U.S.'s ubiquitous need for energy and global commitment to counterterrorism, it is clearly a national interest to see a stable Nigeria in Sub-Saharan Africa. Achieving stability will ultimately depend on how Nigeria tackles the corruption that continues to plague it. While there is no patent solution to this problem, research shows indirect methods of approach best attack the core symptoms that allow corrupt practices to occur. While an indirect approach may take longer and yield less visible results than a more direct approach, ultimately its effects will prove widespread and lasting. Nigeria has 168 million reasons to be hopeful. It's time it invests in this most precious resource.

VI. Recommendations

To better "incentivize accountability" into Nigeria's educational system, this paper offers the following recommendations:

Improving Data Collection

The GoN should reform its accounting system through widespread and mandatory use of computers and other automated systems. This would increase the amount of data in the system and facilitate the auditing process by making it easier to "follow the money trail". With limited computer capacity, it's too easy to falsify documents, lose documents, and slow down the accountability process. Additionally, *the GoN should continue to collaborate with international partners for the use of surveys such as the 2010 Nigeria Education Data Survey.* Surveys are a powerful method for obtaining data about the system. The analysis of that data informs future decision-making and subsequent courses of action.

Strengthening Management Capacity

The GoN should adopt international financial reporting standards (IFRSs) for book-keeping. In addition to standardizing procedures for managers to follow, it would assist in the auditing process because international agencies would have a standardized benchmark from which to conduct the audits. Another area that needs significant attention is the knowledge base of Nigeria's managers. Considering the dearth of qualified managers in its educational system, *the GoN should seek training assistance from International partners for the purposes of*

upgrading the skill-set of its managers, particularly in the areas of statistics,

accounting, and auditing. As discussed previously, managers implement policy

and thus require the necessary skill-set to do so effectively.

Ensuring Oversight Integrity

Due to their susceptibility to corruption, internal auditing agencies are an

unreliable source for auditing. Therefore, *the GoN should develop an auditing*

process that combines both internal and external auditing agencies. To be

effective, external audits must be conducted by a neutral, independent body at

random intervals.

U.S. Specific

USAID is the lead U.S. agency for implementation of this strategy. Other nations

such as Korea, Japan, the United Kingdom, and France also supply assistance

to the GoN along this line of effort, but USAID currently works in parallel with

these countries.[61] Therefore, *USAID should strive for better unity of effort with*

other international partners to develop a common approach toward problem

solving in Nigeria. The military's role in this strategy is extremely limited and its

presence could actually be counterproductive.[62] Therefore, *USAFRICOM should*

maintain a <u>supporting</u> relationship with USAID Nigeria and be prepared to

provide assistance such as infrastructure and logistics support as required.

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